



THE

IRISH QUESTION.

I. HISTORY OF AN IDEA.

II. LESSONS OF THE ELECTION.

BY THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE,

M.P. FOR MIDLOTHIAN.

LONDON.

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“When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”—ST. MARK IV. 29.

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THE IRISH QUESTION.

I. HISTORY OF AN IDEA.

In the year 1868, I was closely associated with the policy of disestablishing the Irish Church. It was then, not unfairly, attempted to assail the cause in the person of its advocate. To defeat this attempt, an act became necessary which would otherwise have been presumptuous and obtrusive. In order to save the policy from suffering, I laid * a personal explanation before the world. The same motive now obliges me to repeat the act, and will I hope form a sufficient excuse for my repeating it.

The substance of my defence or apology will, however, on the present occasion be altogether different. I had then to explain the reasons for which, and the mode in which, I changed the opinions and conduct, with respect to the Church of Ireland then established, which I had held half a century ago. I had shown my practical acceptance of the rule that change of opinion should if possible be accompanied with proof of independence and disinterested motive ; for I had resigned

* ‘A Chapter of Autobiography,’ Murray, 1868.

my place in the Cabinet of Sir Robert Peel in order to make good my title to a new point of departure. On the present occasion, I have no such change to vindicate ; but only to point out the mode in which my language and conduct, governed by uniformity of principle, have simply followed the several stages, by which the great question of autonomy for Ireland has been brought to a state of ripeness for practical legislation.

It is a satisfaction to me that, in confuting imputations upon myself, I shall not be obliged to cast imputations on any individual opponent.

The subject of a domestic Government for Ireland, without any distinct specification of its form, has been presented to us from time to time within the last fifteen or sixteen years. I have at no time regarded it as necessarily replete with danger, or as a question which ought to be blocked out by the assertion of some high constitutional doctrine with which it could not be reconciled. But I have considered it to be a question involving such an amount and such a kind of change, and likely to be encountered with so much of prejudice apart from reason, as to make it a duty to look rigidly to the conditions, upon the fulfilment of which alone it could warrantably be entertained. They were in my view as follows :—

1. It could not be entertained, except upon a final surrender of the hope that Parliament could so far



serve as a legislative instrument for Ireland, as to be able to establish honourable and friendly relations between Great Britain and the people of that country.*

2. Nor unless the demand for it were made in obedience to the unequivocal and rooted desire of Ireland, expressed through the constitutional medium of the Irish representatives.

3. Nor unless, being thus made, it were likewise so defined, as to bring it within the limits of safety and prudence, and to obviate all danger to the unity and security of the Empire.

4. Nor was it, in my view, allowable to deal with Ireland upon any principle, the benefit of which could not be allowed to Scotland in circumstances of equal and equally clear desire.

5. Upon the fulfilment of these conditions, it appeared to me an evident duty to avoid, as long as possible, all steps which would bring this great settlement into the category of party measures.

6. And, subject to the foregoing considerations, I deemed it to be of great moment to the public weal that the question should be promptly and expeditiously dealt with; inasmuch as it must otherwise gravely disturb the action of our political system by changes of Ministry, by Dissolutions of Parliament,

* I have not in the following pages given explanations on this head, as I think they were sufficiently supplied by my speech on the introduction of the Irish Government Bill in April last.

and by impeding the business, and derogating further from the character of the House of Commons.

These were the principles, which I deemed applicable to the subject; and every step I have taken from first to last, without exception, has been prompted by, and is referable to, one or other of them.

From the torrent of reproachful criticisms, brought down upon me probably by the necessity of the case, it is not easy to extricate, in an adequate form, the charge or charges intended to be made. One or two of the statements I must own surprise me; as for example when Lord Northbrook, complaining of me for reticence before, and for my action after, the election of 1885, states confidently that nothing had happened “that could not have been foreseen by any man of ordinary political foresight.” I do not dwell upon the undeniable truth that many things may be foreseen, which, notwithstanding, cannot properly become the subject of action until they have been seen as well as foreseen. But I broadly contest the statement. I assert that an incident of the most vital importance had happened, which I did not foresee; which was not foreseen, to my knowledge, by any one else, even if some might have hoped for it; and which I doubt whether Lord Northbrook himself foresaw; namely, that the Irish demand, put forth on the first night of the Session by Mr. Parnell, with eighty-four Irish Home Rulers at his back, would be confined within the fair and moderate bounds of autonomy;

of an Irish legislature, only for affairs specifically Irish; of a statutory and subordinate Parliament. But in this incident lay the fulfilment of one of those conditions which were in my view essential, and which had been theretofore unfulfilled.

The more general and more plausible form of the attack I think may be stated as a dilemma. Either I had conceived the intention of Home Rule precipitately, or I had concealed it unduly. Either would, undoubtedly, have been a grave offence; the second as a plot against my friends, the first as an attempt to escape from the sober judgment of the country, and to carry it by surprise. The first aspect of the case was presented by Lord Hartington in the House of Commons,* and by Mr. Chamberlain, on the 20th of June, at Birmingham.† The second was put forward by Mr. Bright, in addressing his constituents, ‡ and, with much point and force, by Lord Hartington § at Sheffield. In substance he argued thus: “Mr. Gladstone has never, during fifteen years, condemned the principle of Home Rule. Either then, he had not considered it, or he had assented to it. But, in his position as Minister, he must have considered it. Therefore the proper conclusion is, that he had assented to it. And yet, though I was Secretary for Ireland, with Lord Spencer as Viceroy, when he was

* ‘Times,’ May 11.

† ‘Times,’ July 2.

‡ ‘Times,’ June 21.

§ ‘Times,’ June 29.

Prime Minister, to neither of us did he convey the smallest idea of such assent."

Telling as this statement evidently was, it abounds in leakages. In the first place, I deny that it is the duty of every Minister to make known, even to his colleagues, every idea which has formed itself in his mind. I should even say that the contradictory proposition would be absurd. So far as my experience of Government has gone, subjects ripe for action supply a Minister with abundant material for communication with his colleagues, and to make a rule of mixing with them matters still contingent and remote, would confuse and retard business, instead of aiding it. But letting pass, for argument's sake, a very irrational proposition, I grapple with the dilemma, and say *non sequitur*: the consequence asserted is no consequence at all. It was no consequence from my not having condemned Home Rule, that I had either not considered it, or had adopted it. What is true is, that I had not publicly and in principle condemned it, and also that I had mentally considered it. But I had neither adopted nor rejected it; and for the very simple reason, that it was not ripe either for adoption or rejection. It had not become the unequivocal demand of Ireland: and it had not been so defined by its promoters, as to prove that it was a safe demand. It may and should be known to many who are or have been my colleagues, that I made some abortive efforts towards increasing Irish influ-

ence over Irish affairs, beyond the mere extension of County Government, but not in a shape to which the term Home Rule could be properly applied. Nor have I been able to trace a single imputation upon me, whether of omission or commission, in respect of which I should not, by acting according to the orders of my censors, have offended against all or some of the rules, which I have pointed out as the guides of my conduct, and by which I seek to stand or fall.*

As these disputes of ours, trivial enough from one point of view, are in a certain sense making history, it may be well if, in connection with the thread of these observations, I recall, by means of a very brief outline, some particulars relating to the Government of Ireland, and to the demand for a domestic legislature, during the last half century. For that demand, constant in the hearts of Irishmen, has nevertheless been intermittent in its manifestation ; sometimes wider, sometimes narrower in its form ; sometimes, as in the famine, put aside by imperative necessity ; sometimes yielding the ground to partial and lawless action ; sometimes exchanged for attempts at practical legislation, which for the moment threw it into the shade.

* Among other persons whose animadversions I have examined, I may mention those of Mr. Goschen ('Times,' May 1 and 3), Lord Salisbury ('Times,' June 14 and 30), Mr. Baxter ('Times,' May 1), Sir M. H. Beach ('Times,' June 24), Lord R. Churchill ('Times,' June 28), and Lord Hartington, *passim*.

The great controversy of Free Trade, the reformation of the Tariff, and the care of finance, provided me, in common with many others, nay, in the main provided the Three Kingdoms, with a serious and usually an absorbing political occupation for a quarter of a century, from the time when the Government of Sir R. Peel was formed in 1841. When that period had past, and when the question of the franchise had been dealt with, the general condition of Ireland became the main subject of my anxiety.

The question of a home-government for Ireland was at that time in abeyance. The grant of such a government to that country had only been known to us, in the past, either as the demand for a repeal of the Legislative Union, or in the still more formidable shape, which it presented when the policy of O'Connell was superseded by the men of action, and when the too just discontent of Ireland assumed the violent and extravagant form of Fenianism. The movement for Repeal appeared to merge into this dangerous conspiracy, which it was obvious could only be met by measures of repression.

In none of these controversies had I personally taken any direct share, beyond following the statesmen of 1834 and of 1844 by my vote against Repeal of the Union. Mournfully as I am struck, in retrospect, by the almost absolute failure of Parliament, at and long after those periods, to perform its duties

to Ireland, I see no reason to repent of any such vote. Unspeakably criminal, I own, were the means by which the Union was brought about, and utterly insufficient were the reasons for its adoption; still it was a measure vast in itself and in its consequential arrangements, and it could not be made the subject of experiment from year to year, or from Parliament to Parliament. There was then a yet stronger reason for declining to impart a shock to the Legislative fabric by Repeal. Before us lay an alternative policy, the relief of Ireland from grievance; and this policy had not been tried in any manner at all approaching to sufficiency. It was not possible, at the time, to prognosticate how in a short time Parliament would stumble and almost writhe under its constantly accumulating burdens, or to pronounce that it would eventually prove incapable of meeting the wants of Ireland. Evidently there was a period when Irish patriotism, as represented by O'Connell, looked favourably upon this alternative policy, had no fixed conclusion as to the absolute necessity for Home Government, and seemed to allow that measures founded in "justice to Ireland" might possibly suffice to meet the necessity of the case. But the efforts made in this direction, down to the time of the famine, were, though honest and useful, only partial; and they unhappily had been met by an obstinacy of resistance, which entailed long delays, and frequent mutilations; and which in all cases deprived them of their gracious aspect, and

made even our remedial plans play the part of corroborative witnesses to an evil state of things.

It will be admitted that the Government of 1868-74 endeavoured on a more adequate scale, principally by what is still called in some quarters sacrilege and confiscation, to grapple with an inveterate difficulty. Once more, in acknowledgment of these efforts, the National Party fell into line. But, on the important question of Education, we were defeated in 1873, not by an English but by an Irish resistance. Other measures, to which I had looked with interest, could not be brought to birth. But a happy effect had been produced upon Irish feeling; and prosperity, both agricultural and general, singularly, it might be said unduly, favoured for some years the operation of the Land Act of 1870. We had taken seriously to the removal of grievance, as the alternative policy to Repeal of the Union. So much had been achieved, with the zealous support of the electorate of England and Scotland, that it was our plain duty to carry through that policy to the uttermost, and to give no countenance in any shape to proposals for either undoing or modifying the present constitution of the Imperial Parliament, until it had been established to our satisfaction, or conclusively shown to be the fixed and rooted conviction of the Irish people, that Parliament was unequal to the work of governing Ireland as a free people should be governed.

At this time it was, that the new formula of

Home Rule came forward as matter for discussion, not in Parliament, but in Ireland ; before the Irish public, and under the auspices of Mr. Isaac Butt, who was at that time simply an individual of remarkable ability, not yet the representative or leader of a Nationalist party, far less of a Nationalist majority. There were, at the time, no inconsiderable presumptions that Parliament could meet the wants of Ireland, from the conspicuous acts it had just accomplished. It was very well known that in some cases where those wants had not been adequately met, such as the case of the Borough Franchise in 1868, it was really due to the defective expression of them by Irish Members of Parliament. It was plain that there was no authoritative voice from Ireland, such as was absolutely required to justify a Prime Minister of this country in using any language which could be quoted as an encouragement to the movement on behalf of a domestic Legislature. Accordingly, I contended at Aberdeen in the summer of 1871, that no case had been established to prove the incompetence of Parliament, or to give authority to the demand of Mr. Butt. I felt, and rightly felt, the strongest objections to breaking up an existing constitution of the Legislature, without proof of its necessity, of its safety, and of the sufficiency of the authority by which the demand was made. But even at that time I did not close the door against a recognition of the question in a different state of things. I differed as widely as possible, even at that

time, from those with whom I have been in conflict during the present year. For, instead of denouncing the idea of Home Rule as one in its essence destructive of the unity of the Empire, in the following words I accepted the assurance given to the contrary :

“ Let me do the promoters of this movement the fullest justice. Always speaking under the conviction, as they most emphatically declare, and as I fully believe them, that *the union of these kingdoms under Her Majesty is to be maintained*, but that Parliament is to be broken up.” . . *

Thus, at the very first inception of the question, I threw aside the main doctrine on which opposition to Irish autonomy is founded. This was the first step, and I think a considerable step, towards placing the controversy on its true basis.

In the General Election of 1874, a great progress became visible. Mr. Butt was returned to Parliament as the chief of a party, formed on behalf of Irish self-government. It was a considerable party, amounting, as is said, to a small nominal majority, yet rather conventionally agreed on a formula than united by any idea worked into practical form. But a new stage had been reached, and I thus referred at the opening of the Session † to the proposal of the Irish leader :

“ That plan is this—that exclusively Irish affairs are to be judged in Ireland, and that then the Irish members are to come

* ‘Times,’ Sept. 27, 1871.

† ‘Hansard,’ Debate on Address, March 20, 1874.

to the Imperial Parliament and to judge as they may think fit of the general affairs of the Empire, and also of affairs exclusively English and Scotch. [Mr. Butt : ‘No, no.’] It is all very well for gentlemen to cry ‘No’ when the blot has been hit by the honourable gentleman opposite” (Mr. Newdegate). . . .

“I cannot quit this subject without recording the satisfaction with which I heard one declaration made by the right honourable gentleman who seconded the amendment (Mr. Brooks). My honourable and learned friend said, that Ireland has entirely given up the idea of separation from this country.”

Thus I again accepted without qualification the principle that Home Rule had no necessary connection with separation ; and took my objection simply to a proposal that Irishmen should deal exclusively with their own affairs, and also, jointly, with ours.

After the death of Mr. Butt, Mr. Shaw became the leader of his party, and in 1880 delivered an exposition of his views in a spirit so frank and loyal to the Constitution, that I felt it my duty at once to meet such an utterance in a friendly manner. I could not indeed, consistently with the conditions I have laid down, make his opinion my own. But I extract a portion of my reference to his speech, as it is reported.*

“I must say that the spirit of thorough manliness in which he approaches this question, and which he unites with a spirit of thorough kindness to us, and with an evident disposition to respect both the functions of this House, and the spirit of the English Constitution, does give hope that if the relations between England and Ireland are to become thoroughly satisfactory, the

* ‘Hansard,’ Feb. 27, 1880, vol. ccl. p. 1587.

most important contribution to that essential end will have been made by my hon. friend, and those who speak like him."

In a speech at the Guildhall, on receiving an address, I reverted to the subject of Home Rule. This was the period (October, 1881) when I deemed it my duty more than once to denounce in strong terms the movement against rent in Ireland, and with it the extravagant claims which seemed to me to be made in the name of National Independence. Yet I then spoke as follows :

"It is not on any point connected with the exercise of local government in Ireland ; it is not even on any point connected with what is popularly known in that country as Home Rule, and which may be understood in any one of a hundred senses, *some of them perfectly acceptable, and even desirable*, others of them mischievous and revolutionary—it is not upon any of those points that we are at present at issue. With regard to local government in Ireland, after what I have said of local government in general, and its immeasurable benefits . . . you will not be surprised if I say that I for one will hail with satisfaction and delight any measure of local government *for Ireland*, or for any portion of the country, provided only that it conform to this one condition, that it shall not break down or impair the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament." *

Once more I entered on the subject, in the House of Commons, on February 9, 1882. I referred to the party, led then as now, by Mr. Parnell. The citation is from Hansard :

"Neither they, nor so far as I know Mr. Butt before them, nor so far as I know Mr. O'Connell before him, ever distinctly explained, in an intelligible and practicable form, the manner in

* 'Times,' Oct. 14, 1881.

which the real knot of this question was to be untied. The principle upon which the hon. members propose to proceed is this—that purely Irish matters should be dealt with by a purely Irish authority, and that purely Imperial matters should be dealt with by an Imperial Chamber in which Ireland is to be represented. But they have not told us by what authority it is to be determined what matters, when taken one by one, are Irish, and what matters are Imperial. Until, Sir, they lay before this House a plan in which they go to the very bottom of that subject, and give us to understand in what manner that division of jurisdiction is to be accomplished, the practical consideration of this subject cannot really be arrived at, and, for my own part, I know not how any effective judgment upon it can be pronounced. Whatever may be the outcome of the hon. member's proposal, of this I am well convinced, that neither this House of Commons, nor any other that may succeed it, will at any time assent to any measure by which the one paramount Central Authority, necessary for holding together in perfect union and compactness this great Empire, can possibly be either in the greatest or the slightest degree impaired. We are not to depart from that principle; and what I put to the hon. gentleman who has just sat down, and to the hon. member who preceded him is this—that their first duty to us and their first duty to themselves, their first obligation in the prosecution of the purpose which they have in view—namely, the purpose of securing the management of purely Irish affairs by Irish hands—is to point out to us by what authority, and by what instrument, affairs purely Irish are to be divided and distinguished, in order that they may be appropriately and separately dealt with from those Imperial affairs and interests which they have frankly admitted must remain in the hands of the Imperial Parliament."

Mr. Plunket hereupon stated that he had taken down my words, and that he could only understand them as an invitation to Irish members to re-open the question of Home Rule. Nor did he see how I could

after using such words resist a motion for a Committee on the subject.* To any and every plan for referring such a subject to a Committee of Parliament I have at all times been opposed. But Mr. Plunket's meaning was evident, nor could I dispute the substance of his interpretation.

I will not weary my reader by adding to citations by which his patience has already been so severely tried. But I ask him to remember that down to this time no safe-guarding definition of Home Rule had been supplied, and no demand, in the constitutional sense, had been made by the Irish nation. I beg him then, after he has read the foregoing declarations, to place himself for a single moment in my position, as one who thought conditions to be indispensable, but also thought that the question might under conditions be entertained, and then to ask himself whether it was possible more carefully to indicate in outline the limits within which the subject of Irish self-government might, and beyond which it might not, legitimately be considered, and whether it is anything less than absurd to impute to me † that my "principles" forbade me to promote it?

* The 'Times' of January 8, 1882, states that in my speech, as Prime Minister, I "diverged, amid general amazement," into the question of a separate Legislature, and supporting Mr. Plunket, said that the language which I used was "susceptible of an interpretation which, we fear, may do infinite and irreparable mischief."

† Sir M. H. Beach at Bristol ('Times,' June, 24, 1885).

I next pass to the period preceding the election of 1885. It had now become morally certain that Ireland would, through a vast majority of her representatives, present a demand in the National sense. But no light had been thrown, to my knowledge, upon the question what that demand would be. Further, not only was there a Tory Government in office, but one which owed much to Mr. Parnell, and which was supposed to have given him, through its Lord Lieutenant or otherwise, assurances respecting Irish Government, which he had deemed more or less satisfactory. Under these circumstances, I conceived that my duty was clear, and that it was summed up in certain particulars. They were these. To do nothing to hinder the prosecution of the question by the Tory Government if it should continue in office (of course without prejudice to my making all the efforts in my power to procure a Liberal majority). Entirely to avoid any language which would place the question in the category of party measures. But to use my best efforts to impress the public mind, and especially the Liberal mind, with the supreme importance, and the probable urgency, of the question. And lastly, to lay down the principle on which it should be dealt with. These rules of action applied to the circumstances of the hour those governing principles, which I have above enumerated. I proceeded on them as follows.

It was impossible for me, while ignorant of the

nature and limits of the Irish demand, to give an opinion upon it; and even had it been possible, it would have been in conflict with the condition which I have numbered (p. 5) as the fifth. But, to give emphasis to the importance of the question, I severed it in my Address from the general subject of Local Government for the three kingdoms. Ireland had arrived, I said, at an important epoch in her history ; * she had claims to a special interpretation of the principles of Local Government.† It would be the solution of a problem, testing the political genius of these nations.‡ Woe be to the man who should prevent or retard the consummation.§ It would probably throw into the shade all the important measures, which in my Address I had set out as ripe for action.|| And the subject is one “which goes down to the very roots and foundations of our whole civil and political constitution.” ¶ And yet it has been said, strangely enough, that I gave no indication to my friends, except of Local Government in the sense of County Government for Ireland.**

* Address of Sept. 17, 1885, p. 20.

† Ibid. 21. ‡ Ibid. § Ibid. p. 22.

|| First Midlothian Speech, Nov. 9, 1885, Speeches, p. 44.

¶ Ibid.

** In the speech just quoted, I also said that for a Government in a minority to deal with the Irish question would not be safe. Certainly such an operation could not but be attended with danger; but that I thought it might nevertheless be properly undertaken is demonstrated by the tender of my support in it to Lord Salisbury, conveyed after the Election through Mr. Balfour, although the Ministerial party scarcely reached 250.

Lastly I laid down, over and over again, the principle on which we ought to proceed. It was to give to Ireland everything which was compatible with “the Supremacy of the Crown, the Unity of the Empire, and all the authority of Parliament necessary for the conservation of that Unity.”*

It appears to me that the whole of the provisions of the Irish Government Bill, lately buried, but perhaps not altogether dead, lies well within these lines, and that my case thus far is complete.

What I have in these pages urged has been a defence against a charge of reticence. On the charge of precipitancy I need not bestow many words. What antagonists call precipitancy, I call promptitude. Had Mr. Pitt in 1801 carried Roman Catholic Emancipation, as we suppose he wished, many an Englishman would have thought him precipitate. Precipitancy indeed was avoided, but at what cost? For nine-and-twenty years the question was trifled with on one side the Channel, and left festering on the other, and emancipation was at last accepted as an alternative to civil war. Such is not the manner in which I desire to see the business of the Empire carried on. It was not pondering the case; it was paltering with the public interests. I do not deny that promptitude is disagreeable in politics, as it often is to a doctor’s or a surgeon’s patient. But if the practitioner sees that, by every day’s delay,

* Address, p. 21.

the malady takes hold and the chances of health or life are dwindling away, it is his duty to press the operation or the drug, and the sufferer will in due time be grateful to him for the courage and fidelity, which at first he mistakenly condemned.

I have endeavoured to point out the conditions, under which alone the question of a statutory Parliament for Ireland could be warrantably entertained. The real test may be stated in one word : the ripeness or unripeness of the question. All men do not perceive, all men do not appreciate, ripeness, with the same degree of readiness or aptitude ; and the slow must ever suffer inconvenience in the race of life. But, when the subject once was ripe, the time for action had come. Just as if it had been a corn-field, we were not to wait till it was over-ripe. The healing of inveterate sores would only become more difficult, the growth of budding hopes more liable to be checked and paralysed by the frosts of politics. For England, in her soft arm-chair, a leisurely, very leisurely consideration, with adjournments interposed, as it had been usual, so also would have been comfortable. But for Ireland, in her leaky cabin, it was of consequence to stop out the weather. To miss the opportunity would have been not less clearly wrong, than to refuse waiting until it came. The first political juncture which made action permissible, also made it obligatory.

So much, then, for precipitancy.

II.

I.—LESSONS OF THE ELECTION AS THEY REGARD
THE LIBERAL PARTY.

THE satisfactory adjustment of the Irish question will now, I apprehend, be the supreme object of every member of the Liberal party who has embraced its prevailing sentiment at the present crisis. I shall, therefore, principally seek to draw attention to the bearings of the late Election on that question.

But I will first endeavour to dispose of an important, though secondary point. Every Liberal politician will feel a reasonable anxiety to estimate aright both the immediate effects of the Election upon his party, and the lessons which it teaches as to the real strength and eventual prospects of that party; inasmuch as it, and no other, has been, during the last half century, the principal feeder of the political thought of the nation, and the main organ of its activity. In the remarks which follow, I intend no sort of reproach.

It has this year, unhappily, been divided throughout Great Britain into a main body, and a seceding or dissentient wing, of which the energy has of necessity been developed in directly opposing the candidates who belonged to the main body of the party, on the ground of the paramount importance

attaching to the Irish question. The result has of course, for the party, been disastrous, as a very large share of its energies have been spent in a suicidal conflict. Out of 292 contests in Great Britain, no less than 114 have been fought between candidates professedly Liberal. Every one of these was for a seat which was essentially Liberal. The result, therefore, does not exhibit nominally a deduction from the total roll of the party. But there have been, also, contests between Liberals, or Dissentient Liberals, and Tories. Where Tory and Dissentient have fought, the Dissentient has probably suffered from inability to marshal the full Liberal force. In the far more numerous cases, where Tory and Liberal have fought, the Liberal has commonly suffered from the defection of all the Dissentients; most of these abstaining from the poll, but some, in conformity with the advice of Lord Hartington, and, I think, of Mr. Chamberlain, actually transferring their votes to the Tory candidate.

The Liberal party as a whole has been, since the Reform Act, the stronger of the two parties in the constituencies. The measure of its preponderance has sensibly increased with the extension of the franchise. From 1834 to 1868, the Tory party was rarely under, and frequently over, 300 strong. In 1841, it gained a majority of eighty in straight fighting. Since the establishment of household suffrage in the towns, it has never had a majority; except in 1874,

when the Home Rule party, finally breaking away from the Liberals with whom they most commonly had counted, took definite form as a separate section of the House of Commons. The majority of Tories, over Liberals alone, then amounted to fifty-nine ; and it was known to be due partly to class interests, cultivated of late years so assiduously by the Tories, but mainly to discontent, and consequent slackness and abstention, in the Liberal ranks. In 1868, 1880, and 1885, the Tory strength never approached three hundred, but fell much below its old standard. The Liberal majorities over the Tories, in these Parliaments, averaged nearly one hundred. On the whole it might probably be a fair though a rough statement of the comparative strength of the two parties in the country, if we were to set down the Liberals as represented, on the average, by four-sevenths, and the Tories by three-sevenths, of the electoral body.

What, then, was the loss of Liberal strength at the late election in consequence of the schism ? The test previously supplied by voting in the House of Commons is definite so far as it goes. Two hundred and twenty-eight Liberals voted for the Irish Government Bill, and ninety-three against it. This test exhibits the strength of the schism as greatly exceeding one-fourth of the whole. It very slightly exceeds two-sevenths, at which I take it for present purposes.

It is distributed, however, with very great inequality

among classes. It has hitherto commanded, I fear, not less than five-sixths of the Liberal Peers. If we go to the Liberal working men, I do not believe it has touched a fraction higher than one-twentieth. But I now refer to independent working men. If we take the portion of the Liberal party, throughout the country, composed of those who may be termed employers, or who are socially in a position to draw with them the votes of others, it would, I fear, be a moderate computation or conjecture that, of this important and leading section of Liberals, four-fifths at least were numbered among the Dissentients ; and these drew with them large numbers of dependent, though, I doubt not, as a rule perfectly willing voters.

Again, the strength of the schism was unequally distributed, as is that of the party, in constituencies as well as in classes. In very many constituencies Liberal and Tory strength are nearly balanced. In these a deduction of one-fifth, or one-tenth, or even less, from the normal strength, transfers the seat as matter of course. It is impossible to estimate with precision the loss of Liberal strength through the schism ; but it must have been greater than either of these fractions would represent. In this ruinous state of facts, the results have been as follows. The party as a whole has been reduced from 333 in the last Parliament to 269, or by less than one-fifth. The Liberals of the main body have been reduced from about 235 to 196, or about one-

sixth. The smallness of the aggregate poll as compared with 1885, even on the Conservative side, is worthy of notice, and appears to show that a fraction of the electors, not inconsiderable, still holds its judgment in suspense.

Again, the total poll in Great Britain was—

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| For Liberals | 1,344,000 |
| For Dissentient Liberals. . . | 379,000 |
| For Tories | 1,041,000 |
| For Tories and Dissentients . | 1,420,000 |

Thus the Liberals of the main body came within 76,000, or only four per cent. of the united strength of the Tories and the schism. Considering that the aggregate party had suffered a loss, which cannot be taken at less than twenty or thirty per cent., this is a remarkable result.

Nor is there any obvious levity or presumption in saying that, to all appearance, at the first moment when Liberalism is again united, it must again become predominant in Parliament. But our anticipations of its real strength in the future grow more and more confident when we consider how much it is that Toryism, under circumstances of unprecedented advantage, has been able to achieve. It now reckons 316 members of Parliament. That is to say, as against the rest of the House, it is in a minority of thirty-eight; and it is less by nineteen than the Liberal numbers returned to the last Parliament. It has failed to win from our shattered and disunited party the same moderate amount of success

which we obtained against it in November last, when it had the important accidental advantage of the Irish vote. If, with that advantage, it hardly touched the number of 250, and if it cannot obtain a majority of the House when Liberalism is divided against itself in a manner unknown for nearly a century, the inevitable inference, not demonstrable but very highly probable, seems to be that Toryism can never by its own resources win, under the existing laws, a majority of the House of Commons, unless and until the tendencies and temper of the British nation shall have undergone some novel and considerable change.

II.—THE LESSONS OF THE ELECTION AS THEY REGARD IRELAND.

There is nothing in the recent defeat to abate the hopes or to modify the anticipations of those who desire to meet the wants and wishes of Ireland.

Let us look first at the result of the Election as it is exhibited in the total return of members to the House of Commons.

The Liberal and the Irish supporters of the policy of the late Government, taken together, amount to 280. The opponents of that policy are 390, showing a majority of 110—a large number without doubt. It has been bravely stated by the Prime Minister that this is an irrevocable verdict. It is certainly a verdict without any instant appeal. But the authority which gives such verdicts has power to revoke

them, and is in the practice of revoking them ; and, moreover, has seen and may see them disobeyed by the representatives whom it has empowered not merely or mainly to repeat a formula, but to deliberate upon and to follow the exigencies of public affairs.

In order to estimate truly the value of such majorities, let us refer to recent history ; bearing in mind especially, that the Session of 1886 was the first and only Session, in which the adoption of the policy was clearly and unequivocally demanded by the Irish nation, and the first and only Session, also, in which it had the support of a British party, or a British ministry.

In 1841, the Election turned mainly on the Corn Law. The proposal to repeal it had been, since the Reform Act of 1832, frequently, and of late almost annually, debated ; and the country had had unusual opportunities of mastering the question, through the energetic action of the Anti-Corn-Law League. Nevertheless, the people returned in 1841 a Parliament which by a majority of ninety-one placed the Conservative party in office to uphold the Corn Law. And, considering that many Whigs, who would not join in ejecting the Whig Government were friendly to the Corn Law, we may state without apprehension that the majority returned to support that law in 1841 was even larger than that now returned, in 1886, to oppose the Irish policy of the late Government.

Yet this very Parliament of 1841, by a majority of 98, repealed the Corn Law in 1846.

There are many elements, beside that of number, which go to determine the prospects of an opinion or a policy. A policy which is affirmative, which is definite, which is complete, which rallies its adherents on one and the same ground, has standing advantages over a combination which agrees only in negations, whose ideas advance to-day and recede to-morrow, which proposes no definite settlement, and waits upon the chapter of accidents. Especially is it a mighty advantage to have a nation at our back ; for a nation never dies. In this case we have more even than a nation. Few indeed, so far as I know, of our opponents are bold enough to deny that we have with us, in a degree hard to match, the general opinion of the widely extended British race ; not to say of the civilised world beyond the confines of England, isolated on this occasion alike from her sisters and her children, from her rivals and her allies.

At the outset of the American Civil War, the friends to the Abolition of Slavery were not even a party ; they were no more than a section or a group. But, because they saw that time and events must needs work with them, they were content to bide their time. It came, and came speedily. In two years, the irrevocable word of freedom was spoken from the lips of authority. We may well be content to bide our time ; for we see that time and events are working, and must work, on our side.

Nor is this the only solace. What may be termed

the pot-valiant language, to which hot and passionate tempers have been occasionally treated, is now heard no more. No longer is the idea of holding Ireland by attachment, instead of holding it by force, illustrated by the supposed parallel of an attempt to govern by attachment, instead of police, the criminal population of London. No more is the proposal of self-government for Ireland compared with a proposal of self-government for Hottentots. No more is heard the loud demand for measures of repression, which produced the policy named by the present Leader of the House of Commons the policy of the 26th of January. Yet the agrarian crimes reported by the Constabulary were (inclusive of threatening letters) in the 62 days of December and January, 185 ; in the 61 days of June and July, 194 ; and, while in two years preceding there was but one agrarian murder, in the twelve latest months there have been ten.

What is weightier still, no more do we hear of the famous twenty years, during which Parliament was to grant special powers for firm government in Ireland, and at the end of which, in a larger or a less degree, coercive laws might be repealed, and measures of local self-government entertained.*

It is, then, evident, even amidst the shouts of

* It might be invidious to supply references to verify these statements ; and it is unnecessary, as they are all both recent, and familiar.

victory, that the Tory adversaries of Ireland have had a severe, perhaps an irreparable, loss : they have lost the courage of their opinions. On the other hand, the Dissident Liberals generally, and their leader, seem now to be pledged to immediate and large concession ; many of them on such a scale, that they give to their idea the name of Home Rule, declaring themselves favourable to its principle, and only opposed to the awkward and perverse manner in which it was handled by the late Administration. So that, while a large majority of the present House was elected to oppose the measures of the bygone Ministry, a much less large, but still a decided majority, has bound itself not less strongly to liberal measures of self-government for Ireland. The seceding Liberals, added to the main body of the party and to the Nationalists, make a total of not less than 354. Even of the Ministerialists, some have declared themselves favourable to large concession. These professions of individuals might be drowned in the strong stream of party feeling. Without reckoning, then, on any sort of Tory help, we seem to have in this anti-Home-Rule Parliament a real majority ready to act in the direction at least of Irish wishes, and to run the risk of seeing the grant of a portion used as a leverage to obtain the residue.

So that, look at the question which way we will, the cause of Irish self-government lives and moves, and can hardly fail to receive more life, and more

propulsion, from the hands of those who have been its successful opponents in one of its particular forms. It will arise, as a wounded warrior sometimes arises on the field of battle, and stabs to the heart some soldier of the victorious army, who has been exulting over him.

So much for the case of Ireland within the walls : it is full of hope and comfort. When we go beyond the walls, and consider either the points of vantage gained, or the general progress which has been accomplished, it is yet more, and by far more, favourable.

Let us now take some account of the results of the Elections, as they are exhibited, not in a gross total, but in different quarters of the country.

The fact that Wales has been from the first under an incorporating union, has blinded us to the fact that there are, within the United Kingdom, no less than four nationalities. Of these four nationalities, three have spoken for Irish autonomy in a tone yet more decided than the tone in which the fourth has forbidden it. Scotland has approved our Irish policy by three to two, Ireland herself by four and a half to one, and gallant Wales by five to one. In the aggregate they have returned more than 150 supporters of the policy, and rather above fifty against it; or three to one in its favour.

In England, I might dwell on some remarkable exceptions to the prevailing opinion, such as those of Yorkshire and Northumberland ; portions of the

country commonly supposed to be above, and not below, the average in intelligence and force of character. But for the present purpose we must deal with England as a whole, and we find that she has decided against Ireland by returning 336 opponents of our Irish policy, against 129 who support it.

This is not, then, a partnership of three kingdoms, or of four nationalities, upon equal terms. The vast preponderance in strength of one among them enables her to overbear the other three, and to reverse their combined judgment. The case may be even carried a little further. The minority adverse to Ireland in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, taken together, is twenty-five per cent. of the whole. The minority favourable to Ireland in the English return, though a small minority, reaches twenty-eight per cent. of the whole. So, then, England speaking by much less than three-fourths of her whole number of members, can give, against Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, speaking conjointly by three-fourths of their members, an absolute majority on the aggregate return of no less than 110. Let us illustrate the state of facts by a supposed case. Whenever the people of England think one way in the proportion of two to one, they can outvote in Parliament the united force of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, although they should think the other way in the proportion of five to one. And if England thinks one way in the proportion of three to one, she can outvote Scotland, Ireland, and Wales

together, although they were each and all to return the whole of their members to vote against her.* There are, therefore, reasons of a very intelligible kind why England should at the first blush take a favourable view of the advantages of incorporating unions.

But the question of majority and minority does not rule the whole case. Ireland, with the minority of 280 in her favour, and carving out of that aggregate minority large majorities in three out of the four nationalities, stands far better than she would stand were that minority proportionably diffused in four, or even in three of them: were our opponents able to say that England, Scotland, and Wales were all against her.

* The figures stand thus:—

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| England has members | 465 |
|-------------------------------|-----|

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Scotland | 72 |
| Ireland | 103 |
| Wales | 30 |
| | 205 |

Case 1. — $\frac{2}{3}$ of 465 = 310

$\frac{1}{6}$ of 205 = 34

—
344

But $\frac{1}{3}$ of 465 = 155

$\frac{5}{6}$ of 205 = 171
— 326

Majority . . 18

Case 2. 465 — 116 = 349

The rest of the House 321

Majority . . 28

The recent contest has been fought upon the question of nationality : upon the title of Ireland to some recognition (in Lord Carnarvon's phrase) of her national aspirations. Now, in the first place, this very fact, that an election has been contested on grounds of nationality, of itself gives a new place to nationality as an element of our political thought. Secondly, these nationalities will be inclined to help one another. Ireland has received signal assistance from Scotland and from Wales on the great and capital subject of her nationality. Should there be, and will there not be ?—questions coming forward, in which Scotland or Wales have a special national interest or feeling, it is probable that Ireland, so long at least as she continues to have a voice through her members in British affairs, will reciprocate the boon. What is not less likely, and even more important, is that the sense of nationality, both in Scotland and in Wales, set astir by this controversy, may take a wider range than heretofore. Wales, and even Scotland, may ask herself, whether the present system of intrusting all their affairs to the handling of a body, English in such overwhelming proportion as the present Parliament is, and must probably always be, is an adjustment which does the fullest justice to what is separate and specific in their several populations. Scotland, which for a century and a quarter after her Union was refused all taste of a real representative system, may begin to ask herself whether, if at the first she felt something of an unreasoning

antipathy, she may not latterly have drifted into a superstitious worship, or at least an irreflective acquiescence. Of two things I feel assured. First, whatever practical claims either of these countries may make on their own behalf will be entertained and disposed of without stirring up the cruel animosities, the unworthy appeals to selfishness, the systematic misrepresentations, which have told so fearfully against Ireland. And, secondly, that the desire for Federation, floating in the minds of many, has had an unexpected ally in the Irish policy of 1886; and that, if the thing, which that term implies, contains within itself possibilities of practical good, the chance of bringing such possibilities to bear fruit has thus been unexpectedly and largely improved.

Let it not, however, be supposed for a moment that England is to be regarded as hostile to the claims of Ireland. What we have before us is not really a refusal; it is only a slower acknowledgment. Whatever efforts may have been made by individuals to bring the national mind at the Election of 1885 to a perception of what was coming, it must be remembered that a powerful party had at that time, on account of the Irish vote, the very strongest reasons for keeping the Irish question out of view, and that they set up other cries, such as the "Church in danger," which were known and familiar, and which drew away attention from what was real to what was imaginary. So it is no great wonder or offence if,

when the subject was novel, and when the most powerful and best organised classes in the country were resolutely bent on arguments which darkened all its bearings, it should have remained a little obscure. But mark the progress that has been made. A subject which, twelve months ago, was almost as foreign to the British mind as the differential calculus, has been inscribed among the chief lessons of all Liberal teaching in every town and county of the land, and is everywhere supported by a large body of persons with a warmth and earnestness equal to any that is felt for any of the dearest and most familiar aims of public policy. All the currents of the political atmosphere as between the two islands have been cleansed and sweetened ; for Ireland now knows, what she has never known before, that, even under her defeat, a deep rift of division runs all through the English nation in her favour ; that there is not throughout the land a district, a parish, or a village where there are not hearts beating in unison with her heart, and minds earnestly bent on the acknowledgment and permanent establishment of her claims to national existence.

She knows also that many, if not most, of her adversaries have paid the highest compliment to her claim for the adoption of the measure of 1886, in adopting, it is to be presumed as a political necessity, the method of systematically misstating it. Because they conceive it to tend to separation, they describe it as being in itself Separation. Because they think

it would bring about a Repeal of the Union, they describe it as being a Repeal of the Union. That is, by reason of what they think (most erroneously) that it would produce, they habitually describe* it as being that which they know it not to be. It is just as in an arithmetical sum ; the misstatement of the terms of the problem, of course, if not detected, makes the problem hopeless. It is without example, so far as I know, in the political controversies of the last half century. It establishes a precedent which may, with some kind of excuse, be used hereafter against its authors. It is a practice analogous to hitting foul in pugilism, or

* Still worse is the endeavour to tempt the voter through his selfishness. From an illustrated placard, printed by Bale, Great Titchfield Street, I cite the following words. After describing the majority of the Irish nation as rebels, it proceeds to say that, as the result of Home Rule, "The labour market of England would be flooded with Irishmen, wages lowered." In the 'Times' of July 22, a defeated Dissident complained that hardly a single word on his side had reached the agricultural labourers. The secretary of the Liberal Association replied by showing that, on behalf of this very Dissident, the labourers were informed by placards on every wall that, if they voted for his opponent, "swarms of poor Irishmen would come over and lower wages, besides which 100 millions were to be spent on buying out Irish landlords, which would enormously increase taxes on your tea, coffee, cocoa, &c." We should all husband as much as possible in this controversy our small stock of Christian charity. But could the person, who wrote that the concession of the demand of the Irish people would drive away the Irish people from Ireland, himself have believed what he wrote? That it would raise wages in England, by largely drawing back the Irish, may not be very probable, but is certainly a less absurd proposition.

if seem
to me
be true

using weapons in war, which are prohibited by the laws of war. It constitutes a proof of the weakness in argument of a cause, driven to supply by prohibited means its poverty in legitimate resource.

Apart from this grave aspect of the case, is there not something beyond the ordinary licence of controversy in charging upon the Irish people the idea and intention of Separation, in connection with the present subject?

As the adversary believes the measure involves by way of consequence the separation of the countries, he is entirely justified in pressing his argument; but he should surely press it in the right way.

There are two methods of conducting the argument, either of which it has been open to him to follow, and which I will call respectively the humane and the savage method.

The Irish nation, while it is recovering from its very natural estrangement, and learning with a good heart the accents of loyalty, disclaims in the most emphatic and binding way, by the mouth of its authorised representatives, the idea of separation. The opponent of Home Rule might say, "I take you at your word; I am convinced you do not mean Separation; but I will show you that, by certain consequence, this mischievous Bill involves it." That I call the humane method of argument.

But the method generally adopted has been to say, "You disclaim Separation; but I do not believe you;

and so I call you, and all who aid and abet you, Separators." Is it too much to call this the savage method?

At least it may be held that, when we begin by giving the lie, there ought to be in the essence of the thing that we impute something of a nature to render our imputation probable. Is this the case with Separation? What is there in Separation, that would tend to make it advantageous to Ireland?

As an island with many hundreds of miles of coast, with a weak marine, and a people far more military than nautical in its habits, of small population, and limited in her present resources; why should she expose herself to the risks of invasion, and to the certainty of enormous cost in the creation and maintenance of a navy for defence, rather than remain under the shield of the greatest maritime Power in the world, bound by every consideration of honour and of interest to guard her? Why should she be supposed desirous to forego the advantage of an absolute community of trade with the greatest among all commercial countries, to become an alien to the market which consumes (say) nine-tenths of her produce, and instead of using the broad and universal paths of enterprise now open to her, to carve out for herself new and narrow ways as a third-rate State? Why, when her children have now, man by man, the free run of the vast British Empire, upon terms of absolute equality with every native of Great Britain, should she be

deemed so blind as to intend cutting them away from the greatest of all the marts in the world for human enterprise, energy, and talent, and to doom them to be strangers among nearly three hundred million men, with whom they have now a common citizenship? Why is she to be insensible to all the indications nature herself has given of the destiny of Ireland to be our partner in weal and woe, and why should she be ready to enter upon a desperate contest of strength with a people of six times her number, of twelve times her wealth, inferior to her in no single element of courage or tenacity? This people, to whom even justice itself has never yet enabled her to offer an effective military resistance, are now to be frightened out of their property lest Ireland should offer them violence, to tear herself away, unattracted to any foreign centre (for there is none), unwarmed by sympathy beyond her shores (for she would have none), unblessed by Heaven, and quarrelling suicidally with all that could minister to her material or her political welfare! No; the truth is, and history proves it, England has been strong enough to be, even through a course of generations, unjust to Ireland; and now it is not want of strength that will put a stop to such injustice, but her better will, her better knowledge, the action of the nation substituted for the action of the few, and an improved and improving moral sense in public affairs. What reason here indicates, history proves; for never did Separation become a substan-

tive idea in Ireland, until the one unhappy period when the warlike instincts of France coincided with that infatuation of the British Government which in Ireland raised tyranny and sanguinary oppression, as well as the basest corruption, to their climax. Only superlative iniquity led Ireland even for a moment to dream of separating. Even then, the remedy would have been worse than the disease. None but the few fanatics of crime dream now of such a thing; and they, who impute it to the Irish nation, treat it as a nation made up of men who are at once and equally traitors, knaves, and fools.

III.—PURCHASE AND SALE OF LAND IN IRELAND.

I do not propose to examine in detail the causes of the signal defeat, which the Irish policy of the late Government has now received at the polls of England, or rather of the middle and southern parts of England. But, in my opinion, the chief among those causes is not to be found in chimerical fears of Separation, or in aversion to the grant of self-government to Ireland as a whole, or even in want of time to understand the principles and bearings of our measures. The most powerful agent in bringing about this result was, in my judgment, aversion to the Bill for the Purchase and Sale of Land in Ireland.

This aversion grew out of misapprehension, which was itself founded on (what I think) misrepresenta-

tions, such as the complexity of the subject made it impossible to remove. But, however illegitimate may have been the means employed, the result is not to be denied, and has to be taken into practical account. The gigantic bribe which was detected in an offer to pay to Irish landowners what Parliament might deem to be the fair market value of their rented lands ; the attempt to combine a large equity with policy in an employment of British credit warranted by such high calls, and in its pecuniary results absolutely safe ; the daring attempt we made to carry to the very uttermost our service to the men whom we knew to be as a class the bitterest and most implacable of our political adversaries, by declaring our two Bills to be, in our own minds, and for the existing juncture, inseparable : all these have been swept ruthlessly off the field of present action by the national verdict. Not merely the verdict expressed by the English majority ; for the sentiment is shared by many of the staunch supporters of Irish autonomy, and has not been hitherto repudiated by the Nationalists of Ireland, who had given a somewhat reluctant assent to proposals entailing so heavy a liability on the whole public resources of their country.

The two Bills, for the government of Ireland and for the Purchase and Sale of Land, have been used at the Election to destroy one another. The Land Bill had many friends, chiefly among Tories and Dissident Liberals. But their love of the Land Bill

was not so strong as their aversion to Home Rule, and they allowed it to lie pierced with a thousand gashes, in order that through it the sister measure of Home Rule might be wounded. On the other hand, the mass of the Liberals throughout the country were fully prepared for the grant of Irish autonomy, but were in many cases adverse to the ill-understood measure for the Purchase and Sale of Land, which they were taught to believe could, under no circumstances, be severed from it. Hence many a seat was given to the Tories by Liberal abstentions, and not a few to Liberal Dissentients, by those who acquiesced in the destruction of the one Bill for the sake of securing the destruction of the other. So, then, this Siamese twinship of the Bills, put to scorn by those for whose benefit it was in great part designed, has been deadly to both, and has proved the most powerful cause of the defeat of the Liberal party at the elections in England.

I think it my duty explicitly to acknowledge that the sentence which has gone forth for the severance of the two measures is irresistible, and that the twinship, which has been for the time disastrous to the hopes of Ireland, exists no longer.

At the same time, the partnership between enemies of Home Rule and enemies of the Land Bill, which has brought about this result, will now, we may hope, be dissolved. The enemies of Home Rule have ever been the keenest promoters of Land Purchase in the

interest of the Irish landlords. The enemies of the Land Purchase Bill, instead of standing at ease, will now have to use all their vigilance for the purpose of preventing the adoption of schemes of Land Purchase founded on principles very different from, and, indeed, opposite to, those of the Bill lately consigned to the limbo of abortions.

We have lying before us a new point of departure; but, for the sake of the subject, it may be right to offer a slight explanation on the Bill.

A main object of that Bill was to get rid of the bad and dangerous schemes, which alone had seemed possible in the present centralised condition of our arrangements for the government of Ireland. Among the principles of the plan, any or all of which I reserve my title to uphold and urge at the proper time on their merits, and not as inseparable portions of a wider scheme, were these:—

1.—To eschew entirely the establishment of the relation of debtor and creditor between the Imperial Treasury and the Irish occupier individually.

2.—To deal only with an authority empowered under the highest sanction to bind Ireland as a whole.

3.—To accept as security nothing less than what would suffice to place the fifty millions of Consols issuable under the Act on a footing of perfect equality in the market with the mass of Consols already there.

4.—In fulfilment of this view, to place the charge,

not on the rents proceeding from the land alone, but also on the entire public revenues of Ireland.

5.—To direct the collection and course of these revenues in such a channel, as to make their receipt and application not less safe and certain than the receipt and application of the revenues of Great Britain.

I trust that every British Liberal, consentient or dissentient, who may think that there are reasons sufficient to warrant some intervention of Imperial credit in order to solve the question of Irish land, will steadily resist any attempt to fasten on us a scheme of inferior security ; and especially will set his face against the establishment of direct relations between the Treasury and the individual occupant of the soil in Ireland, by reason, not only of pecuniary risk, but also, and far more, of very grave political danger.

The subject may be summed up in three short queries.

First, is it right that England, both on grounds of policy, and as having been art and part in the wrongs done to Ireland by her land laws and by many of her landlords, should bear her share in providing further facilities for the sale and purchase of land in Ireland ?

Secondly, ought this provision to be made by a liberal use, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, of the public credit of the country ?

Thirdly, is it wise or justifiable, instead of dealing

with some public authority in Ireland, to place the Treasury of this country in the direct relation of creditor to scores, or it may be hundreds, of thousands of the persons occupying land in Ireland ?

To the first two questions I give my answer in the affirmative ; to the third I say emphatically, No.

IV.—THE CONSERVATIVE CHARACTER OF HOME RULE FOR IRELAND.

I deviate for a moment from my survey of the political battlefield, to touch on a question more likely to receive consideration now than during the heat of the fight.

For my own part, in arguing for the Irish policy of the late Administration, I have not found it my duty to attempt any narrow appropriation of that policy to the Liberal party. It was indeed eminently agreeable to the principles of that party, because it proceeded upon a rational but a broad and generous trust in the people of Ireland ; upon a large recognition of that people's right to liberty, which, says Mr. Burke,* is “the birthright of our species,” and which “we cannot forfeit, except by what forfeits our title to the privileges of our kind. I mean the abuse or oblivion of our rational faculties,” which “destroys our social nature, and transforms us into something little better than the description of wild beasts.”

* Correspondence, iii. 105.

But unless the policy, from its harmonising with the love of liberty, and its spirit of reliance on a people, be, in the eyes of all but Liberal politicians, guilty of the unpardonable sin, and thus excluded from a hearing, surely it has high titles to a conservative character, and may reasonably lay claim to Conservative favour. For it is especially founded on regard for history and tradition. It aims in the main at restoring, not at altering, the Empire. In this vast mass are straightway discovered a multitude of subaltern integers ; municipalities, counties, colonies, and nations. Does a true conservative policy recommend that the dividing lines, which hedge about these secondary organisations, should be eyed with an eager jealousy, and effaced upon any favourable occasion ? I put aside for the moment all regard to the pollution and the tyranny by which an occasion for the Union was forced into existence ; and I raise the issue on a broader ground. It is surely most desirable that every subaltern structure in an enormous political fabric, having joints and fastenings, tie-beams and rafters of its own, should contribute, by the knotted strength thus inhering in each part, to increase the aggregate of cohesive force, which guarantees the permanence and solidity of the whole.

Intermediate authority, set between the central power and the subject, is a contrivance favourable to both. It softens the whole character of government as a coercive system. It saves the centre from strain;

and saves it also from excess. It gives a domestic aspect to commands which, when proceeding from a remoter source, want their best passport to acceptance. The ruler's will is more largely obeyed; and the quality of the obedience is improved as the quantity is enlarged, for it becomes a willing obedience. There are functions of government which require from their own nature a central impulsion. But, wherever the nature of the thing to be done does not suffer, the more locally it is determined the better.

And in all cases where, population not being homogeneous, the different portions of a country (such as the United Kingdom) are variously coloured, as by race, or religion, or history, or employments, the argument against centralisation acquires new force, in proportion as the central agent loses the power of sympathy and close adaptation to peculiar wants and wishes, and may lose also, where relations have not been altogether kindly, even the consciousness of this ingenital defect. When matters have reached such a stage, the ruler resents that resentment in the mind of the subject, which his own incapacity has raised. This comparative coldness, sometimes passing into aversion, discontent, and even disloyalty, we find in the case of Ireland, and of Ireland alone among all the portions of the Empire. All the rest are held together by freewill; she alone is under the bond of force. In opposition to it, she has maintained from

first to last the best protest in her power, and has availed herself progressively more and more of the increased means of protest with which, in singular blindness to the state either of her mind or our own, or possibly both, we have incongruously supplied her. And when, more positively urging her demand, she at the same time narrows the demand itself, so as to meet imperial jealousies and scruples, she is rewarded for her moderation by the loud assertion that the Irish nation speaks, it is true, but speaks with a lie in its mouth.

So, then, we may fairly say of the policy which aims at giving Ireland an Irish Government, not only is it a policy broad, open, trustful, popular, and therefore liberal; but also it is a policy which, instead of innovating, restores; which builds upon the ancient foundations of Irish history and tradition; which, by making power local, makes it congenial, where hitherto it has been unfamiliar, almost alien; and strong, where hitherto it has been weak. Let us extricate the question from the low mist of the hour, let us raise the banner clear of the smoke of battle, and we shall see that such a policy is eminently a Conservative policy.

V.—TO WHICH PARTY IS THE WORK RESERVED?

It is one of the best characteristics of the Liberal party, that it has never foregone an opportunity of closing with a good measure, come it from whom it might.

It was in an endeavour to apply this principle, that in December last I promised my best support to Lord Salisbury, if his Government would introduce a comprehensive measure for the settlement of the Irish question. This was an offer made under highly favourable circumstances. For, as between the two great parties in the State, the question of Irish self-government, in its principal aspects, was then open ground. The Liberal party of 1800 had the honour of resisting the Incorporating Union. But for the last sixty years, on the question of repealing that measure, as the proposal was entertained by neither party, no distinctive character had attached to the action of the one or the other. Unhappily, the last Tory Government, notwithstanding the encouragement given by the opinion of their Viceroy, was not prepared to move. Accordingly, the question of self-government for Ireland in Irish affairs has now taken its place in politics with the Liberal coat of arms stamped upon it, and has become a Liberal measure. But there remains an important question behind. Will it, or will it not, like other Liberal measures, owe its coming place on the Statute Book immediately, if not causally, to the action of official Tories, sustained and made effective by Liberal patriotism and Liberal votes?

There are at least four great cases, which have been placed on record within my memory, and in every one of which a Conservative Government, after having resisted a great proposal up to the

moment immediately preceding the surrender, then became its official sponsor, and carried it into law. They are the cases of the Test Act in 1828, of the Roman Catholic Relief in 1829, of Corn Law Repeal in 1846 (when, however, Sir Robert Peel had done all in his power to throw the conduct of the question into Liberal hands), and of Extension of the Franchise in 1867. In the last of these cases, not only had the measure been resisted, but a Liberal Government had been overthrown in the preceding year on account of a measure less extended, not indeed than the very meagre original proposal of 1867, but than the measure which, by the strength of Liberal votes, and with the sanction of the Derby-Disraeli Government, was eventually adopted. It seems extremely doubtful whether any one of these measures would have been carried through both Houses, except under the peculiar conditions which secured for them on each occasion, both the aid of the Liberal vote in the House of Commons, and the authority of the Tory Government in the House of Lords. One other case stands alone. The Tory chiefs of 1832, with the exception of Sir Robert Peel, fiercely resisting the Reform Bill of Lord Grey, and stopping its progress in their own familiar fortress, the House of Lords, declared themselves nevertheless willing to take charge of the question. But public indignation was too strong to permit the progress of the experiment.

A main reason, which governed me in the offer of last December, was my full conviction that if the

Tory Government had acted as many were then inclined to hope, the proposal would have an impartial hearing from the Liberal party, and an amount of support far more than sufficient, as in 1829 and 1846, to make up for Orange and Tory defections, so as to secure the speediest and easiest, which would in my judgment have been also the most satisfactory, accomplishment of the great design.

With regard to that design, I do not venture to forecast the future, beyond the expression of an undoubting belief that a measure of self-government for Ireland, not less extensive than the proposal of 1886, will be carried. Whether the path will be circuitous; whether the journey will be divided into stages, and how many these will be; or how much jolting will attend the passage; it is not for me to say. Nor is it for me to conjecture whether in this, as in so many other cases, the enemies of the measure are the persons designed finally to guide its triumphal procession to the Capitol. But I hope that, should this contingency once more arise, every Liberal politician, irrespective of any misgivings (should he be tempted to entertain them) as to the motives of the men, will remember that his inexorable duty is to extract the maximum of public profit from their acts.

VI.—CONCLUSION.

If I am not egregiously wrong in all that has been said, Ireland has now lying before her a broad and even way, in which to walk to the consummation of

her wishes. Before her eyes is opened that same path of constitutional and peaceful action, of steady, free, and full discussion, which has led England and Scotland to the achievement of all their pacific triumphs. Like the walls of Jericho, falling, not in blood and conflagration, but at the trumpets' peal, so, under the action of purely moral forces, have an hundred fortresses of prejudice, privilege, and shallow prescription, successively given way. It is the potent spell of legality, which has done all this, or enabled it to be done. The evil spirit of illegality and violence has thus far had no part or lot in the political action of Ireland, since, through the Franchise Act of 1885, she came into that inheritance of adequate representation, from which she had before been barred. Ireland, in her present action, is not to be held responsible for those agrarian offences, which are in truth the indication and symptom of her disease; from which her public opinion has, through the recent beneficial action, become greatly more estranged; and to which she herself ardently intreats us to apply the only effectual remedy, by such a reconciliation between the people and the law, as is the necessary condition of civilised life. The moderation of the Irish demands, as they were presented and understood in the Session of 1886, has been brightly reflected in the calm, confiding, and constitutional attitude of the nation. I make no specific reference to the means that have been used in one deplorable

case, under guilty recommendations from above, with a view to disturbing this attitude, and arresting the progress of the movement ; for I believe that the employment of such means, and the issuing of such recommendations, will eventually aid the cause they were designed to injure. It is true that, in the close of the last century, the obstinate refusal of just demands, and the deliberate and dreadful acts of Ireland's enemies, drove her people widely into disaffection, and partially into the ways of actual violence. But she was then down-trodden and gagged. She has now a full constitutional equipment of all the means necessary for raising and determining the issues of moral force. She has also the strongest sympathies within, as well as beyond, these shores to cheer, moderate, and guide her. The position is for her a novel one, and in its novelty lies its only risk. But she is quick and ready of perception : she has the rapid comprehensive glance, which the Generals she has found for us have shown on many a field of battle. The qualities she has so eminently exhibited this year have already earned for her a rich reward in confidence and goodwill. There is no more to ask of her. She has only to persevere.

August 19, 1886.

POSTSCRIPT.

SINCE these pages were written, the principal intentions of Ministers with respect to Ireland have been announced.

The Statesmen, who in January deemed coercive measures an absolute necessity, do not now propose them, although agrarian crime has rather increased, and Ireland has been perturbed (so they said) by the proposal of Home Rule.

This is a heavy blow to Coercion ; and a marked sign of progress.

I am concerned to say that on no other head do the announcements supply any causes for congratulation.

1. Large Irish subjects, ripe for treatment, are to be referred to Commissions for inquiry. This is a policy, while social order is in question, of almost indefinite delay.

2. Moreover, while a Commission is to inquire whether rents, or judicial rents, are or are not such as can be paid, the aid of the law for levying the present rents in November has been specially and emphatically promised. This is a marked discouragement to remissions of rent, and a powerful stimulus to evictions.

3. A project has been sketched of imposing upon the State the payment of all monies required to meet the difference between these actual rents, and what

the land can fairly bear. This project is in principle radically bad, and it would be an act of rapine on the Treasury of the country.

4. Whereas the greatest evil of Ireland is that its magisterial and administrative systems are felt to be other than Irish, no proposal is made for the reconstruction of what is known as ‘ Dublin Castle ’ government.

5. It is proposed to spend large sums of public money on public works of all kinds for the material development of Ireland, under English authority, and Dublin Castle administration. This plan is (1) in the highest degree wasteful; (2) it is unjust to the British tax-payer; and (3) it is an obvious attempt to divert the Irish nation by pecuniary inducement from its honourable aim of national self-government, and will as such be resented.

6. The limitation of local Government in Ireland to what may at this moment be desired for Great Britain, is just to none of our nationalities, rests upon no recognised principle, and is especially an unjust limitation of the Irish national desire.

In my opinion, such a policy for dealing with the Irish question ought not to be, and cannot be adopted.

August 22, 1886.





